



BILL RICHARDSON
GOVERNOR

State of New Mexico
ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT
Office of the Secretary
Harold Runnels Building
1190 St. Francis Drive, P.O. Box 26110
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502-6110
Telephone (505) 827-2855



RON CURRY
SECRETARY

CINDY PADILLA
DEPUTY SECRETARY

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Contact: Marissa Stone, NMED Communications Director
Telephone: (505) 827-0314 or (505) 231-0475

Environment Department Begins \$3 Million Cleanup of Petroleum Contamination and Water Line Replacement for Residents in Peñasco

(Santa Fe, N.M.) The New Mexico Environment Department and A-1 Auto gas station in Peñasco began a project to clean up soil contaminated with petroleum and replace a drinking water line in Peñasco after local residents complained drinking water tasted and smelled like petroleum. About \$3 million from the New Mexico Corrective Action Fund will pay for the project.

The plan involves excavating and disposing of about 11,000 cubic yards of petroleum contaminated soil from petroleum storage tanks and replacing about 700 feet of a water supply line along a stretch of N.M. 75.

“We worked on a solution to the problem so residents could have safe, clean and good tasting water — this was a serious concern to me,” said New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry. “By next week, the department plans to install systems in 12 homes that will filter out the taste and smell of petroleum.”

NMED’s Petroleum Storage Tank and Drinking Water bureaus took water line and tap water samples from concerned residents who live near A-1 Auto in January. Tests of those samples indicated 12 residences were affected by petroleum contamination. NMED provided temporary tap filters to those residents that month.

NMED authorized a Geoprobe investigation near A-1 Auto in February to determine impacts from the contamination of leaks from petroleum storage tanks to the community water line. Results of soil and soil vapor sampling showed significant impacts to the subsurface soils near A-1 Auto and along the southeast to northwest alignment of N.M. 75.

Based on those findings, NMED requires the excavation of contaminated soils along the community water line and replacement of the water line in the defined area of soil contamination; further excavation of contaminated soils at A-1 Auto and on the downgradient property located northwest and adjacent to A-1 Auto.

Daniel B. Stephens & Associates’ (DBS&A) project manager, acting as A-1 Auto’s and PSTB’s representative, attended the town meeting held April 3 to provide residents with the results of their tap water analyses and the plan to clean up the water supply. Residents requested that additional water sampling be performed and that they be provided with whole-house water filtration systems.

PSTB, Qwest, the New Mexico Department of Transportation, Peñasco's water authority representative and DBS&A met on site April 5 to discuss the logistics of the proposed excavation and water line replacement. During this discussion, PSTB agreed that additional sampling and whole-house filtration systems should be provided for the effected residences.

Additional tap water sampling was performed during on April 11. Analytical results indicate concentrations of contaminants have decreased. That is probably the result of routine flushing of the water system by the Peñasco water system operator.

PSTB and DBS&A identified the appropriate filtration system needed for the contaminants of concern and plan to install the systems by May 23. Those systems will consist of granular activated carbon (GAC) canisters with treatment capacities rated at 40,000 gallons. That should provide affected residents with up to three months of treated water under normal household use.

PSTB has received and approved the plan to excavate and replace the water line and to remove any contaminated soil at and downgradient of A-1 Auto, including under N.M. 75. The project is expected to be completed by Sept. 15.

An additional soil investigation is underway currently along the south side of N.M. 75 to determine if petroleum contamination has the potential to breach the southern waterline. Any petroleum contamination that has or potentially could damage the existing water line will be removed during the excavation and disposal project.

Additional periodic tap sampling will be performed after the installation of the new water line to ensure that drinking water is safe and clean. The PSTB will continue to monitor the local groundwater conditions after project completion.

For more information contact Marissa Stone, NMED Communications Director, at (505) 827-0314 or (505) 231-0475.

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